Members Use of Information and Changing Visions of the Parliamentary Library

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Abstract

The assumption underlying parliamentary libraries is that Members have a fundamental need for high-quality information services to support their decision-making processes. This assumption can be questioned. The historical importance of the parliamentary library is assessed as a necessary myth projecting the modernity of the parliament and the legitimacy of its decisions. The standard narrative of parliamentary library history—that the evolving visions of parliamentary libraries are responses to the needs of Members—is not supported by the evidence. The origins of the service visions lie more in the copying of other services, responses to expert opinion, and wider professional developments. The library no longer signifies modernity and the myth has become a liability. An alternative paradigm of Members' information work is proposed, based on the concept of bounded rationality and, in particular, the work of Gigerenzer on "fast and frugal" decision making. Recent research confirms the importance of heuristics in decision making by Members. In this model of decision making, the parliamentary library makes its impact through improved environmental understanding and the framing of matters for decision, rather than the delivery of information at the point of decision. Giving easier access to information, and focusing on information for specialist Members, may have more impact on the quality of information actually used than efforts to improve product quality. A focus on the deployment of library competences in new areas of parliamentary information work is part of a vision for the future.

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Introduction

The origins of this paper lie in professional unease. The discussion of parliamentary libraries is founded on an assumption—rarely expressed or examined—that parliamentarians need high-quality information services. One major professional association for example, describes the purpose of parliamentary libraries thus: "Access to impartial, current, accurate and timely information is *fundamental* to democratic legislatures. In their legislative and representative roles, parliamentarians *need* information . . ." (APLA 2008, emphases added). The words *fundamental* and *need* are unequivocal. Given the context, a source (or *the* source) of this fundamental and needed information must be the library. There is nothing exceptional in this statement—it is simply an illustration of the standard professional faith. In the profession, this supposed need of Members can be taken as an explanation for the origin of parliamentary library services, service developments can be seen as responses to changing needs, and library need can be projected into infinity.

After some years in a parliamentary library and reading academic and in-house research on how Members actually work, I had some difficulty in reconciling the profession's assumptions with professional knowledge. Members do use the library a great deal, or rather their staff do. It serves a purpose—but maybe some Members all of the time, and certainly all Members some of the time, appear to manage to do their work without the information of the library. This experience is not exceptional, as the published research and accounts from other parliamentary libraries make clear. Could the assumption once have been valid but the explosion in information and "information overload" render it obsolete? This appears to fit the history, at first glance. The parliamentary library's origins are in the ideals of the Enlightenment: its purpose to serve a curious and well-informed Member who uses reason and science to hold the executive to account and to contribute on legislative and policy issues. But since the late seventeenth century, when the parliamentary library concept came into being, the executive has grown in scale and in scope, covering many more issues in which policy choices and consequences are complex.[1] The populations represented are more numerous. Information has increased in volume, turnover, and diversity of format and channel. Individual Members, by contrast, are not necessarily more numerous than in the assemblies of the nineteenth century.[2] If Members were still trying to make decisions based on full information, then their jobs would be impossible—they would be in a situation of gross task and information overload. But in considering the history of "visions" of parliamentary libraries the question went deeper. Was this ideal of the fully-informed, rational decision-making Member *ever* anything more than a convenient fiction that legitimized parliamentary decisions and justified library budgets? Organized information services (libraries) were a growth industry from the

late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. The progress was dazzling—peaking with the development of research services—but how connected were they really to their client bases? The recent growth and impact of alternatives (online and otherwise) has shown that libraries are neither as essential nor as loved as they maybe thought they were. Equally, the history of new service visions and practical development of services appears to owe less to Member demand and more to ideology and expert opinion. Returning to the present, Members are certainly extremely busy people and yet they manage—how? The paper proposes that we should reconsider the full-information model of Member decision making and look instead to the concept of "bounded rationality."

Practically, parliamentary libraries continue to do very useful things, so do the myths matter? That depends. If the model is impossible to live up to, then it creates a risk. Critiques are enabled by this model, a model that parliamentary libraries have themselves passively or actively accepted. To do the right thing for the wrong public reasons can store up trouble for the future. It matters also if the ideal causes efforts to be misdirected. Finally, it matters if it demoralizes people in libraries where the experience is far from the ideal—and they might imagine, probably incorrectly, that other services are very different. This paper argues for a less idealized and more pragmatic model of how Members work, and so for a more pragmatic and effective model of how parliamentary libraries can serve them.

The references in the paper lean very heavily to Westminster and, to a lesser extent, the U.S. Congress and European Parliament. There appears to be little independent work published on *any* parliamentary libraries, and as of 1999 there had, apparently, been "little investigation of information use as part of political decision-making" (Marcella, Carcary, & Baxter, 1999, p. 168)—a situation that seems to have changed little. The research base is narrow and the conclusions must be provisional. The paper combines evidence from published works with operational knowledge from the European Parliament library. This has been supplemented by knowledge generously shared in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Section, where parliaments from around the world are represented. However, the discussion does not refer in particular to the European Parliament Library except where indicated, and the analysis is my own responsibility, not that of anyone else in the Section.

For convenience, in the paper *parliamentary library* is used to signify the whole range of services provided by IFLA Section Members *including the parliamentary research function and those styled as "information" or "documentation services. Member* is used throughout to refer to elected representatives. *Assistant* is used as the title for the personal research staff of Members.

Whose "Changing Visions"?

Change in Parliamentary Libraries Seen as an Internal Process of Parliaments

The "changing visions" of the parliamentary library can be broadly summarized as follows (these are the visions of the services at the leading edge of innovation in each period—not every service evolved in this way):

- Origins—a nineteenth-century book collection for the educated gentleman[3]
- From the late nineteenth century—the new scientific librarianship and "documentation"
- From c. 1914—the development of reference services; and then, later, analytical and research services[4]
- From the 1960s/70s—the use of computers to store and communicate information
- From the 1990s—electronic services and the decline of the physical book

Histories of parliamentary libraries tend to present these changing visions as local adaptation to the needs of Members. This explanation is undeniable but it is not the whole story. The history of change is one of importing ideas and standards from elsewhere, not only spontaneous adaptation to local need.

The *Assemblée Nationale* in France had the first parliamentary library (1796) closely followed by the U.S. Library of Congress (1800), their origins were in revolution and the Enlightenment.[5] Since then, the Library of Congress (and, later, others) has acted as a reference for adequacy, for what a modern institution requires.[6] There is no universally-accepted method of measuring information service need, use, or workload. So using benchmarks is a practical solution—but then the process cannot be presented as a simple response to local need. For example, in fourteen of the European Union Member states, the parliamentary library was founded in the same year (or very shortly after) the parent institution came into its modern form.[7] This suggests that the library was created as a "normal" attribute of a modern parliament; it cannot have been a response to Members' direct experience. One only has to look at some of the magnificent buildings of nineteenth-century parliamentary libraries to get the message: "this institution takes knowledge seriously." So how much was the message given by parliamentary library buildings an aspiration, how much a reflection of real daily work? They can be seen as expressions of the symbolic power of information in a society where legitimate decision making had to be rational as well as democratic.

The role of information in decision making was the subject of a seminal article by Feldman and March, "Information in Organizations as Signal

and Symbol." They observed a contradiction between research findings and a simple version of decision theory that goes as follows:

> Relevant information will be gathered and analyzed prior to decision making; information gathered for use in a decision will be used in making that decision; available information will be examined before more information is requested or gathered; needs for information will be determined prior to requesting information; information that is irrelevant to a decision will not be gathered. Studies of the uses of information in organizations, however, reveal a somewhat different picture. (1981, p. 172)

Their survey of the evidence led them to radical conclusions:

> (1) Much of the information that is gathered and communicated by individuals and organizations has little decision relevance. (2) Much of the information that is used to justify a decision is collected and interpreted after the decision has been made, or substantially made. (3) Much of the information gathered in response to requests for information is not considered in the making of decisions for which it was requested. (4) Regardless of the information available at the time a decision is first considered, more information is requested. (5) Complaints that an organization does not have enough information to make a decision occur while available information is ignored. (6) The relevance of the information provided in the decision-making process to the decision being made is less conspicuous than is the insistence on information. (p. 174)

Rather than ascribe this catalog to organizations being "stupid," Feldman and March suggest that it is due to the limitations of our ideas about information. Information has *symbolic* power, its use "symbolizes a commitment to rational choice. Displaying the symbol reaffirms the importance of this social value and signals personal and organizational competence" (p. 182). As they explain in more detail:

> When legitimacy is a necessary property of effective decisions, conspicuous consumption of information is a sensible strategy for decision makers. The strategy need not be chosen deliberately. It will accompany processes that work. Decisions that are viewed as legitimate will tend to be information intensive. Decision makers who are persuasive in securing acceptance of decisions will request information, gather information, and cite information. The behaviour is a representation of appropriate decision making. (pp. 178–179)

Feldman and March were discussing the use of information primarily in modern bureaucracies (public or private) in Western societies. But if we adopt this perspective for decision making by parliamentarians in the same societies, their demand for information and research may be seen as driven (consciously or otherwise) partly by its symbolic power. Information is a source of legitimacy in a culture that puts a high value on rational decision making.

Feldman and March do not claim that the use of information is purely symbolic—practical information processes run in parallel with symbolic ones, or the same process can share practical and symbolic purposes. A study of policy research in the Bundestag observes this same duality:

> Political decision makers turn to experts for two fundamental reasons. First, they use expertise to make their decisions more reasonable, justifiable and effective. Second, because the use of expertise gives decisions a greater claim to public acceptance, politicians hope that citizens will be more willing to accept a decision based on (or at least rationalised with) expert advice. Expertise thus serves what might be called problem-oriented and politics-oriented functions. The former refers to the "substantive" use of expertise to identify, understand and make decisions about socio-technical problems. The latter refers to the communicative use of expertise to justify policies, as well as the strategic use of expertise to delay decision or avoid responsibility. (Brown, Lentsch, & Weingart, 2005, pp. 81–82)

To go further on the idealistic rather than practical origins of the parliamentary library, it is suggested that their development has historically been advocated by, at most, a few Members—although this is only a hypothesis based mainly on the UK history. In general, there is little sign of mass demand for reform based on practical experience.[8] In the UK case, 1945 marked a turning point in reform of the parliamentary library but interest mainly came from *newly-elected* Members. It is rather external experts that appear in the UK case as motive forces over the long term for improved library services, with critiques and proposals published from the 1930s onward.[9] The developing body of parliamentary library professionals has also played an increasing part in reform worldwide.[10]

Adaptation as an Outcome of Change in Information Management at Societal Level

The models for service development come also from the wider information world. The first parliamentary libraries emerged in a new age of information: "It was during the age of reason and revolution, between roughly 1700 and 1850, that information . . . came of age.' During the Enlightenment new institutions, techniques and formats began to emerge, furthering knowledge and enhancing the storage and communication of information: the encyclopedia, the scientific academy, the salon. . . . Existing elements of the information infrastructure—publishing activity and libraries for example—intensified and proliferated . . ." (Black, Muddiman & Plant, 2007, p. 11). The scientific parliamentary library of the late nineteenth century emerged from an information world where new technology was speeding transmission and proliferating formats—"Documentary chaos ensued. Contemporaries testified to the information overload of the time." (Black et al., p. 16). Library science was one solution to this overload. This period saw also the rise of mass production and of large

corporations—a "second industrial revolution" "marked by a realisation of the importance of scientific and technical knowledge to production, thereby enhancing the value of research and development and of information sources and services" (Black et al., p. 25).[11] In the United States this spawned new corporate and public information services that created the professional framework used by parliamentary libraries in the twentieth century, beginning with the U.S. Congress Legislative Reference Service set up in 1914. In Britain, company libraries developed mainly after 1914. They tended to exist in new industries, where the library was often a prominent and expensive showpiece demonstrating the modernity of the company. The "'output' of early company libraries in respect of value added to corporate profits and efficiency could not be determined precisely. This did not concern the enterprises that pioneered company libraries. For them, the high utility of the company library, although not quantifiable, was unquestionable" (Black et al., p. 150). The use as a symbol of modernity; the willingness to accept a high cost and confidence in its value despite the lack of data on outcomes—this is reminiscent both of the grand nineteenth-century parliamentary libraries *and* the more recent case of company websites. For the UK, the interest in a scientific approach to information seems to have peaked around 1945–50—precisely when complete reform of the House of Commons Library was proposed. Historically, the service visions of the modern parliamentary library have been established elsewhere.

The Double Life of the Parliamentary Library

In summary, parliamentary libraries have developed in part as *symbols* signifying that their institution is modern and properly informed. Further, the changing visions of the parliamentary library derive primarily from the wider world and from professionals, academics, and a few parliamentarian reformers; and not directly from the practical and expressed needs of most Members. To stress: the argument is *not* that the parliamentary library has lacked real utility; rather that its utility and evolution has perhaps been something apart from the public myths. The myths have justified resources and innovation and in those terms can be seen as "necessary."

Is "Parliamentary Library" Still a Potent Concept?

Is "Library" a Powerful Image of Modernity for Parliaments Today?

If parliamentary libraries are founded on a myth, what happens when that myth loses potency? Does "library" still signify modernity? One indication came when a new parliament was established in 1999:

> Those of us who were planning the research and information service . . . made a number of crucial decisions. . . . First of all, we decided *not* to call it a library. There was no collection of books, no room to house

> them . . . no suggestion that there would be a quiet atmosphere in which to study them. The emphasis was on speed, service, and innovation. We needed a brand; we needed to make an impact, and we needed to capture the imagination. SPICe, the Scottish Parliament Information Service, was born.[12] (Seaton, 2005, p. 2)

A far cry from the apparent confidence in the library of the nineteenth and earlier twentieth century! With positive motives, it was consciously decided to *obscure* that the service was a form of library.[13]

If the library was the corporate website of a previous era, what is it now? Parliamentary libraries, like other libraries are in

> a ubiquitous information environment, where information professionals and knowledge providers are no longer the dominant players nor, indeed, the supplier of first choice. Short of appropriate consumer theories, visions and a robust and appropriate evidence base there is a danger that the information professions are becoming increasingly rudderless and estranged from their users and paymasters. The warning signs are already there. Public libraries are in real trouble and academic libraries risk being decoupled from their user base as users continue to flee the physical space. (Nicholas, Rowlands, Withey, & Dobrowolski, 2008, pp. 5–6)

In 1960, in his influential article "Marketing Myopia," Theodore Levitt pointed out the risk of companies believing they are in a "growth industry" as it leads to complacency based on the belief that demand will keep growing and that there is no substitute product. It leads also, according to Levitt, to a focus on products and product improvement rather than on customers and the value they seek.

> The usual result of this narrow pre-occupation with so-called concrete matters is that instead of growing, the industry declines. It usually means that the product fails to adapt to the constantly changing patterns of consumer needs and tastes, to new and modified marketing institutions and practices, or to product developments in competing or complementary industries. The industry has its eyes so firmly on its own specific product that it does not see how it is being made obsolete. (Levitt, 2004, p. 145)

The apparently unstoppable rise of library and information services from the nineteenth century through to the second half of the twentieth century perhaps brought such a "marketing myopia" to the professional information world. Two examples from Levitt's classic article ring some alarm bells of recognition. One is the quote from the 1930s food retailer who said it was "hard to believe that people will drive for miles to shop for foods and sacrifice the personal service chains have perfected and to which [the consumer] is accustomed"—referring to a new competitive model called a 'supermarket' (p. 140). Another is Levitt's observation that motorists go to petrol stations because they are forced to, not because they like them (pp. 145–146). We can question if parliamentary

libraries' high-quality customer service will actually save them from the march of Google and their like; we can question if the past use of libraries was motivated by economics and a lack of choice—both reasons now being undermined—rather than love. Parliamentary libraries have been less concerned with book collections, reading rooms, and mass use than public or academic libraries, but they may still be affected by the declining value put on a library. It is doubtful if the research service component of parliamentary libraries is immune to skepticism—as can be seen in the work of Wu discussed below.

Does Practical Performance Compensate for Loss of Potency as a Symbol?

If historically there was no *necessary* connection between library functions and the needs of most Members, then do they actually fulfill their supposed role? One survey reports: "Overall, such research as has been carried out paints a somewhat bleak picture of decreasing awareness and use of parliamentary library services, suggesting a growing gulf between service and user understandings of 'need,' while users turn increasingly to a growing variety of alternative sources of information" (Marcella, Baxter, Davies, & Toornstra, 2007, p. 922).

Another observer, Wu, summarizes the ideal model of parliamentary research: "This model is simple: a problem first exists, and then researchers study the problem and come up with compelling, empirical findings. Members . . . in turn, construct a public policy to deal with the problem on the basis of these empirical findings. The result is a policy moulded by the preceding scientific analysis" (2008, p. 356). Wu argues that, for the U.S. Congress, the model lacks evidence to support it—he claims that "Instead, there is widespread agreement that the research findings that go to Congress hardly have a direct impact on public policy outcomes (p. 356)."[14] Wu suggests that research products are used mainly when they reinforce an existing political position. He summarizes his explanation for why research does not make the intended impact:

> Congress usually does not apply scientific knowledge in the making of public policy because: first, Members of Congress are more interested in adopting policies that will help them get re-elected than policies that conform to standards of rationality and efficiency; second, bargaining, compromise and the reconciliation of political interests are a necessary part of the legislative process; and, lastly, Members of Congress favour popular conceptions of causal logic. Policy-oriented research, in turn, does not compel legislators to adopt a certain alternative because research findings are often ambiguous, inconclusive, incongruous and even contradictory to other research findings. (pp. 361–362)

As Fischer argues, the model of expert advice may not be valid in any case because "the pace of politics is faster than the pace of scientific consensus formation, decisions have to be made before the scientific dust has settled" (2009, p. 140).

It is important to stress that Wu presents no original evidence for lack of impact. His paper relies on earlier studies that would themselves require review before accepting his conclusions (2008, p. 356). Discussion in the IFLA Section has indicated that it is difficult to trace impact, let alone measure it, even with inside knowledge that library information has been used. But the fact that Wu can even propose the argument is itself an indicator: if the oldest and probably the most powerfully-equipped parliamentary library does not make an impact that is clear and indisputable, if it does not unequivocally fulfill the ideal role, what chance for the rest?

Toward an Alternative Paradigm for Members' Use of Information

The Traditional Paradigm:Unbounded Rationality

The ideal Member served by the ideal parliamentary library is a vision that seems to be melting into air after two hundred years of post-Enlightenment life. Can we reconsider the question of how, really, Members work with information? Writing of libraries in general, Nicholas et al. make the accusation: "information professionals have been bleating on about 'users' since time immemorial, but they have not really made that much progress in understanding them, certainly not their behaviour at the coalface" (2008, p. 4).

That modern Members face information overload is commonplace among information professionals.[15] (Curiously, neither Members nor political scientists say much about it. They speak of *time pressure* as the critical problem—which is not the same thing).[16] But even if it is real, then information overload is not new in human evolutionary terms or in the historical case of Members.[17] The problem stands out now because of the volume of information, which *in the context of a belief in full-information decision making*, appears unmanageable. One study of Members summarizes this full-information model:

> A decision-making process is a course of action or procedure that results in a formal judgement or choice being reached. For this to be possible, choices or options must be provided from which selection can be made. The ability to evaluate or choose from options is underpinned by access to accurate, reliable and comprehensive information about the choices available. It is essential that decision makers have access to information that is free of bias and/or that reflects the full range of opinion existing. The transformation of information about these options into knowledge or intelligence is central to the effectiveness of the decision-making process. [It is contended that] the quality of the decision relies upon the quality of the information available. (Marcella et al., 1999, p. 170)

It assumes that a rational political decision can be reached only by comprehensive information gathering and analysis. But as the lead author

(Marcella) herself noted in a later study, it is impossible to achieve this for all decisions: "Many of those in parliament do not know what they need to know, *cannot possibly know everything that they need to know*, and frequently cannot predict what they will need tomorrow or next week" (2007, p. 931, emphasis added). Wu describes "members of Congress who are flooded with scientific data, research findings and cost-benefit analyses from the support agencies, from the executive branch, from various interest groups and independent research institutes, and from epistemic communities and academic world, on almost every imaginable policy issue" (2008, p. 359).

Feldman and March noted that the symbolic power of information is not a given: "Information is significant symbolically because of a particular set of beliefs in a particular set of cultures. These beliefs include broad commitments to reason and to rational discourse, as well as to the modern variants that are more specifically linked to decision-theory perspectives on the nature of life. As social norms change, the relevance of information as a symbol, or signal, changes with them" (1981, p. 184). They postulated that if belief in rational decision making declined, then the symbolic value of information would decline with it (p. 184). In the years since 1981 this hypothesis has been tested. As Fischer reports, experts and expert information do not have the value they once had: "a growing number of citizens are unwilling to uncritically accept the trained judgements of professional experts. Numerous writers have described a lack of trust in experts as one of the critical issues of our time" (2009, p. 4). In a climate where scientific authority is challenged, the symbolic power of parliamentary research and information services in legitimating decisions has reduced.

In summary, the model of unbounded rationality is not viable because Members face too much information, too much complexity. The strength of the model was, arguably, largely symbolic and is in decline. But even if unbounded rationality had been real, is it what citizens need? Do they require Members to be perfect scientists or to be representatives who can reach good decisions in good time?

An Alternative Paradigm: Bounded Rationality

In the field of economic theory, Herbert Simon developed the concept of "bounded rationality" as a model of decision making. One of the leading followers of Simon's work is Gerd Gigerenzer.[18] Gigerenzer, writing with Selten, summarizes that "models of bounded rationality . . . dispense with the fiction of optimization, which in many real-world situations demands unrealistic assumptions about the knowledge, time, attention, and other resources available to humans" (2001, p. 4). They argue that it is "possible that simple and robust heuristics can match or even outperform a specific optimizing strategy" (p. 4). Information is the critical issue:

> A key process in bounded rationality is limited search. Whereas in models of unbounded rationality all relevant information is assumed

> to be available already, real humans and animals need to search for information first. Search can be for two kinds of information: [for] alternatives. . . . and [for] cues (that is, for reasons and predictors when deciding between given alternatives). Search can be performed inside the human mind (memory) or outside it (e.g. library, internet, other minds). Internal search costs time and attention, and external search may cost even further resources, such as money. Limited resources constrain institutions, humans, animals, and artificial agents, and these limitations usually conflict with the ideal of finding a procedure to arrive at the optimal decision. (Gigerenzer & Selten, p. 5)

Gigerenzer and Selten argue that "contrary to conventional wisdom, limitations of knowledge and computational capability need *not* be a disadvantage" (p. 7). Taking "cues" from the environment, people can use simple decision rules to reach a useful conclusion. Complete information optimizing may take too much time and be achieved too late for a decision—"Simplicity, by contrast, can enable fast, frugal, and accurate decisions" (p. 7). Bounded rationality is not necessarily less rational than unbounded rationality. Significantly, these "fast & frugal" methods are not universal but depend on knowledge of particular environments (p. 7). Gigerenzer and Selten describe three typical processes of bounded rationality models:

1. *Simple search rules.* The process of search is modeled on step-by-step procedures, where a piece of information is acquired, or an adjustment is made . . . and the process is repeated until it is stopped.
2. *Simple stopping rules.* Search is terminated by simple stopping rules, such as to choose the first object that satisfies an aspiration level. The stopping rule can change as a consequence of the length of search or other information. . . . Simple stopping rules do not involve optimization calculations. . . .
3. *Simple decision rules.* After search is stopped and a limited amount of information has been acquired, a simple decision rule is applied, like choosing the object that is favored by the most important reason—rather than trying to compute the optimal weights for all reasons, and integrating these reasons in a linear or nonlinear fashion. . . . (p. 8)

The search process "distinguishes two classes of models of bounded rationality: those that search for alternatives (e.g., aspiration level theories such as satisficing . . .) and those that search for cues (e.g., fast and frugal heuristics . . .)" (p. 8). The term *fast and frugal* in this paper therefore refers to one type of bounded rationality. Gigerenzer and Selten summarize that simple heuristics work because they

> can exploit structures of information in the environment. That is, their rationality is a form of ecological rationality, rather than of consistency and coherence. A second reason is the robustness of simple strategies compared to models with large numbers of parameters, which risk

> overfitting. Third, there are real-world situations involving multiple goals (e.g., accuracy, speed, frugality, consistency, accountability) that have no known common denominator, which poses serious problems to optimization, but can be handled by models of bounded rationality. (p. 9)

Relevance of "Bounded Rationality" to Information Issues in Parliaments

Gigerenzer uses "search" in a broad sense, but his description has parallels in the description of the information search methods of Members and Assistants—if we ignore the negative interpretations placed on them: "users are relatively easily satisfied with any information on a subject that will serve a short-term, uncritical need, the primary concern being that it is swiftly and easily achieved. Searchers will often seek information that will suffice, rather than a comprehensive or rounded view of an issue" (Marcella et al., 2007, p. 926). A more positive interpretation of this behavior is possible. *If* these Members and Assistants have a good understanding of their political environment, *then* they may be able to use poor or limited information—and be aware of its poor quality—but still reach a "good-enough" decision. Professionals see what they consider poor quality information work but they lack the environmental knowledge to understand the process in the same way as the Assistant or Member. This is not to deny the existence of major information literacy challenges in parliaments, as elsewhere. It is only to suggest that the issue is not as clear-cut as it might seem for library professionals. Environmental knowledge is part of the professional differentiation of the Member:

> Members of Parliament possess a special and important body of knowledge and apply this knowledge in their political work: knowledge about rules of the game (both constitutional and parliamentary); detailed knowledge about political ideologies (complex goals and the most effective means to reach those goals); and very considerable knowledge about . . . parliamentary roles. . . . These are the principal components of Westminster's political culture which is not, in anything like its fully developed form, acquired by anyone besides Members of Parliament. (Searing, 1994, p. 372)[19]

Wu notes that research information raises the level of debate: "scientific research has a . . . subtle, indirect, and cumulative effect on congressional policy by changing the way legislators and their staffs look at the world, by setting the terms of debate, by transforming the way problems are identified and addressed, and by altering the very nature of legislation" (2008, p. 357). This refers in part to giving cues to reduce the number of options considered; and also in part to improved environmental understanding. Both can impact positively on the quality of decisions. Discussing technology assessment in the Bundestag, it is noted that the specialist reports "contribute to the conceptualization of problems and the development of parliamentary agendas, even without being directly referenced in

parliamentary debate" (Brown, Lentsch, & Weingart, 2005, p. 91). So parliamentary libraries can impact on the quality of decision making—but perhaps less through the supply of information at the point of decision as the classic model suggests, and more through framing the decisions that need to be made and enhancing environmental knowledge that lubricates the decision process.

Bounded rationality appears much closer to what is known of Members' and Assistants' working style than a model of unbounded rationality. We might expect that they have a repertoire of approaches including that of "full information" and the "fast & frugal." The latter supposes that they use limited information, their own knowledge, and some cues from the environment to reach a decision. The cues might be, for example, "what are the Members who are expert in this field saying"; "what is the political party briefing on this"; "how would this policy position look in the tabloid press/in my constituency"; the views of personal contacts, trusted nongovernmental organizations or experts; or media commentaries.

I have not so far seen Gigerenzer's work applied to the study of politicians, but the use in general of heuristics by politicians has been researched, notably in relation to foreign policy decisions (Miler, 2009, p. 868) as illustrated here:

> Potentially a very lengthy decision-making process is simplified dramatically by eliminating all those options that are . . . ill-advised [in terms of domestic politics]. They are not even considered as potential decisions. Whatever options are left . . . are then examined through a number of heuristic processes that narrow the choices until a course of action is chosen. (Tchantouridze, 2007, p. 3)

Outside of that arena, studies on the use of heuristics in politics have focused on their use by citizens:

> it is widely established that voters have low levels of information. Some argue however that they have more than enough information to make the simple voting decisions they are called on to make in modern democracies . . . "low information rationality" can approximate "high information rationality" through the use of heuristics . . . "short cuts" can approximate "encyclopaedic knowledge." Voters need not become massively informed because they can draw inferences from bits of knowledge they collect as a by-product of ordinary life. One may not know the details of a referendum proposition but if one can know which parties, notables, or interest groups are for or against it, that may be more than enough to come to a conclusion . . . if the unambiguous heuristics are readily available, then such information may be enough to approximate a more informed vote. (Fishkin, 2009, p. 135)[20]

The lack of attention to politicians themselves has been identified as a weakness in the literature and a recent paper has partly addressed the issue (Miler, 2009, pp. 868–869).[21] Miler studied how staff of Members' offices in the U.S. Congress dealt with information regarding constituents'

interest in particular policy issues, looking specifically at the "accessibility heuristic." This is not the kind of policy information that parliamentary libraries typically deal in, but Miler's paper is nonetheless of interest. She notes that the "ease and efficiency of heuristics are attractive to legislative elites who do not have the time to seek out exhaustive information" and cites studies to support this claim (2009, p. 869). The study of Assistants rather than Members is justified by a description that is familiar from other parliaments:

> Staff members are responsible for gathering information about policy issues, providing legislators with relevant information, and representing the legislative office in meetings and informal negotiations. Staff members regularly juggle multiple issues under significant time pressure in an environment with abundant information from multiple sources … [S]cholars have turned to legislative staff members as an invaluable source of information about congressional decision making. (Miler, p. 872)

Miler's assessment of the use of heuristics in this case is quite negative. Heuristics improve the efficiency of information processing but at a cost to information quality. Members' offices in her study relied too much on accessible information that was incomplete and biased (pp. 864–865). In relation to understanding which groups of constituents were affected by a policy proposal, "there is strong evidence that staff members rely on accessible information . . . which is more efficient than seeking out exhaustive information. However, the information recalled by legislative staff members is not only incomplete, but also is a systematically unrepresentative subset of the relevant information . . ." (p. 882). The *most* accessible information is that which the subject can recall from their own memory. The usual factors that affect "accessibility" of information are: frequency, familiarity, salience (meaning something that makes the information vivid or compelling), and predisposition (information that fits with existing knowledge/attitudes).

Miler makes the interesting point that these heuristic processes may occur at an early stage, before the formal decision-making events that are much more studied:

> Legislative staff members rely on the accessibility heuristic when making judgments about the interests of constituents in their district. The use of this cognitive heuristic makes the task manageable, but it also results in an incomplete and systematically unrepresentative view of constituents' policy interests. . . . The congressional and interest group literatures examine inequality in representation by focusing on the decisions legislators make, especially how these decisions can be affected by contributions and lobbying. [However,] . . . much occurs before a legislator engages in the political calculations of how to cast a vote. (2009, pp. 885–886)

It is an illustration of how decisions on policy might be made at the level of individual Member and the potential weakness of formal and reactive

information interventions—especially if the information arrives near the formal decision rather than earlier. Another study discussed a model of political decision making which

> presumes that the government is able to evaluate the entire range of policies. . . . In the fields of political science and cognitive science, an increasing body of research has led to believing that this assumption cannot be realistic. . . . First of all, budgetary procedures involve a broad array of expenditures, which implies a quasi-infinite number of possible policies. Second . . . governments usually make use of reference sources [which are complex documents, so that] . . . evaluating the consequences of a single policy proves in itself a costly process in terms of time spent. . . . Third, many experimental results from the psychological literature show that human beings have a tendency to use heuristics (i.e., easily learnt and applied procedures) when dealing with complex problems, complex decisions, or incomplete information. (Le Maux, 2009, pp. 201–202)

We can conclude that Members' use of heuristics is a fertile field for additional research and something that parliamentary libraries need to consider in designing their services.

Lost in the myth?

We arrive at what appears a bleak conclusion for parliamentary libraries. They owe their existence in part to being a symbol of modernity but that symbolic power is waning. They are exposed to external trends over which they have little control, so are they anyway free to have a "vision" of their own? The research function faces a claim that it has made little direct impact on policy outcomes. They ostensibly exist because decision making should properly be driven by scientific information but they have not produced conclusive scientific evidence of their own value![22] They are founded on a model of Member behavior that was probably never valid and appears superseded. The parliamentary library presenting a balanced and comprehensive portfolio of scientific information is not *necessarily* part of a fast and frugal decision-making world. Where do parliamentary library managers go from here?

Beyond the Myth: Developing a New Agenda for Parliamentary Libraries?

Adapting to the Bounded Rationality Model

For some, the bounded rationality model may be a liberation. Within the myth of full-information decision making, "suboptimal" information processes were perceived as a problem for clients to which a solution had to be found; and their existence was a failure of the library. If those frugal processes are understood as both inevitable and (sometimes/often) superior, then libraries are released to accept the clients for what they are (what they must be). Limited use of library services is not a failure, and

an expensive research report that is read by only one or two people can be excellent value for money. Libraries can draw back from trying (or pretending) to serve all Members with all things and concentrate on where they can actually make an impact.

Members and their offices deal with a vast range of information problems. The approach to them will probably vary in part according to the perceived importance of the topic—impact, public profile, contentiousness, etc. Specialist Committee issues may receive more time. Carey reports work by Gilligan and Krehbiel on the U.S. Congress that offers one explanation for this: "individual legislators are motivated to collect information on policies that improve outcomes for all in exchange for policy concessions on the margin that can be translated into personal electoral support. Committees serve as seed beds both of policy expertise and, via their control over the legislative agenda, of opportunities for their members to secure advantageous policies on the margin" (2006, p. 442). That committees are a significant source of information for individual Members is noted also by Searing (1994, p. 59). The approach to information will also vary according to the style of the Member. A study of Members at Westminster identified four main informal roles for backbenchers: "Policy Advocate," "Ministerial Aspirant," "Constituency Member," and "Parliament Man." These then divide into subtypes, which for Policy Advocate included "Generalist" and "Specialist" (Searing, pp. 32–33). Policy Advocates are likely customers of library services, and in the Westminster of the 1970s, they accounted for around 40 percent of Members, two-thirds of them being "Specialists." The Specialists "don't spend much time in the Chamber . . . they concentrate on research and leverage, on gathering information and then applying pressure behind the scenes . . ." (p. 58). The intelligence gathered is not primarily formal information: "While important books in the field are read, and research is done in the House of Commons Library, Specialists seek current and first-hand knowledge, much of which comes from contact with organizations and individuals outside Parliament," and "Contacts with key individuals in the field can be very useful too, particularly for collecting inside information" (pp. 58–59). This pattern is still familiar today.

If we adopt (or adapt) Searing's categorization, then the assumption is that the *normal* market for information-rich products such as research reports is not "all Members" but only a proportion of them. The proportion for specific topics will be much smaller again. The task of the library, then, becomes more precise: to identify Specialists on a topic and ensure they receive the detailed information useful to them *and* presented in a way that is useful to them. This focuses resources where they will get results rather than dissipating them in trying to deliver a specialist product to suit all Members.

To serve Members adopting the "fast & frugal" route on an issue, there appear to be several options. One is to target the "pathfinders" such as specialist Members. This should have a ripple effect as specialist Members are likely guides for others. The notion is similar to the concept of "information gatekeepers" but with the variation that specialists do not distribute information but rather give cues for decisions. By keeping specialists well informed, the quality of decision making *in general* may be raised. In parliaments (or committees within them) where turnover of Membership is high, then Member expertise does not develop (Carey, 2006, p. 442)—so presumably there are fewer cues, making for a more difficult information environment. The second obvious group of pathfinders is the political party research apparatuses, which in some parliaments may be another important source of signals. The CRS concept of consultancy to individual Members is one method of clarifying options (but it is resource intensive, possibly even for the Member). Another option is publishing research reports so the salient points may reach Members through the mass media—the story of parliamentary research on "Echelon" is one, probably accidental, example of how this can work.[23] Libraries may also produce "briefings" rather than research studies—defining briefings as short summaries of the literature with known policy options and stakeholder positions clearly and concisely presented. This offers what, apparently, Members want—a guide that they can quickly assimilate and fit with other knowledge to reach a conclusion. As one study on information research in a parliament noted:

> For political group advisors and [Members'] Assistants, volume was significant, with a vague sense of what this desired volume might be "comprehensiveness without volume."
>
> In the case of processed information which had been already analysed and synthesised, clarity and conciseness were also mentioned as important qualities, in particular where respondents must make a judgement on very complex issues. . . . (Marcella et al., 2007, p. 927)

It is striking that lobby groups' communication of information is often in clear language; concise; and with a graphical presentation that encourages reading and highlights key points. The products of parliamentary research services, by contrast, tend to be drafted in an academic style and to be conservative in their graphical presentation. Are lobby groups wasting their time, or do they know their readers better? Is making something easy and attractive to read necessarily "dumbing-down"? What value has high-quality content if it is not actually read or used?

There is also an indirect route for the library to improve the quality of information in decision making. The bounds put on search are not fixed—if the cost/benefit of search is improved then it may be expanded. The critical point in this resource decision is *not* necessarily intrinsic

information *quality*—understandably the professional focus of parliamentary libraries—but how *easy* it is to get the information and to process it for decision. Client research in the European Parliament points to ease of use and speed of response as critical. For actual clients, the *helpfulness of staff* is ranked first as the reason for using the service, ahead of quality of information and other factors. But in parliamentary libraries, what level of management support or systematic attention is given to daily person-to-person service or service processes compared with, for example, the management of research processes or of library resources? Yet the quickest route to improving the quality of information *actually used* by Members may come from such measures. The priority could be to make access easier, faster, and more user friendly—and ensuring that this is perceived by potential clients—rather than adding increments of quality to library products.

A Practical Vision for an Uncertain Future

Parliamentary libraries possess a distinctive combination of skills and knowledge focused on information;[24] parliaments are in large part information businesses. Why should these competences be used solely within library walls? The competences may be deployed externally in improving communication with citizens, as the Chilean parliamentary library has done, using Facebook as one tool. This is arguably a new symbol of modernity—the nineteenth- and twentieth-century parliament demonstrated its commitment to involving scientific knowledge in decision making by building libraries; the twenty-first century parliament demonstrates commitment to developing and involving the knowledge of citizens in decision making. This can extend to experiments in "deliberative democracy." Deliberation in this context is "a particular kind of communicative process in which individuals reflect upon their own views in the light of what others have to say, ideally in context free from coercion, manipulation and deception" (Dryzek & Dunleavy 2009, p. 215).[25] Practical efforts to implicate citizens in reflections of this kind typically involve forums—"lay citizens recruited at random from a larger population. They are brought into an information-rich setting and given access to advocates for different sides and expert witnesses" (Dryzek & Dunleavy, p. 222). According to Fishkin, the quality of a deliberative process depends on certain conditions, four being substantive balance, diversity, conscientiousness, and equal consideration (2009, pp. 33–34). The first-listed condition, however, is *information*: "the extent to which participants are given access to reasonably accurate information that they believe to be relevant to the issue" (p. 34). If deliberation is a strategy to extend and renew the popular legitimacy of parliaments, then the centrality of nonpartisan objective information provision to deliberation should ensure a key role for the parliamentary library. The kind of objective and high-quality briefing or

information file that is produced for Members could equally be produced or reused for citizens.

The competences of the library can also be deployed internally to improve access to in-house parliamentary information (as already happens in some institutions) and to support a wider "knowledge management" agenda.

Conclusion

The myth of the scientific Member and decision making based on unbounded rationality sustained the parliamentary library and supported the legitimacy of parliamentary decisions. The myth has been undermined because libraries have lost their near monopoly on quality information, because the image of rational decision making has lost power as a legitimating symbol for parliaments, and because it does not reflect the reality of how Members work. The myth now seems more of a liability—it fails to convince, and it consigns services to a role in which they must fail. Bounded rationality is more plausible as a model of Members' work, and it suggests a different approach to parliamentary library service. To retain relevance, parliamentary libraries must understand and connect with their clients real use of information. They are not in a growth industry any longer. Parliamentary libraries risk irrelevance and decline if they rest on their myth and on their historical value as symbols of a modern informed parliament, just as much as if they rely only on their physical assets, collections, or academic research capacity.

Parliamentary libraries face a challenging prospect with few certainties. However, the usefulness of library competences also extends beyond library walls, and their potential value to the institution may never have been higher. There is a future to be made, beyond the myth.

Notes

This paper represents the personal views of the author and does not reflect the views of the European Parliament. It is a revised and updated version of a paper presented at the IFLA World Library and Information Congress (Milan, August 2009), an edited version of which is scheduled to appear in the *IFLA Journal*, Vol. 36, no. 1, 2010. Additional material in this article includes the review of Feldman and March's work on the symbolic function of information; the new study by Miler on the use of heuristics by a political elite; and brief discussions of Levitt's concept of "marketing myopia" and the relevance of parliamentary libraries to the practice of deliberative democracy. The sections on innovation and core competences have been reduced.

1. In terms of scope, for the UK, Rush (2001) reports research from 1970 showing that 80–90 percent of parliamentary questions could not have been asked in 1900 because they were not matters of government responsibility (p. 29). An indicator of complexity is the volume of legislation: for acts the average number of pages per year went from 237 in 1831 to over a thousand after the mid-60s and almost three thousand in the 1990s. Secondary legislation increased from 995 pages in 1900 to 3,327 in 1994 (pp. 34–35). An indicator of scale of the executive in the UK is the number of nonindustrial civil servants: 1832, 21,000; 1902, 50,000; 1930, 111,000; 1960, 380,000; 1980, 542,000; 1998, 430,000 (p. 31).
2. In the UK since 1800 the number of Members has varied between 615 and 670, while the population was 16 million in 1801 and 59 million in 1998 (Rush, 2001, p. 221).

3. See, e.g., the House of Commons in the nineteenth century: "it came to resemble something between a large-scale country-house library and an aspiring national collection" (House of Commons, 2005, p. 5).
4. "In 1914, Congress passed legislation to establish a separate department within the Library of Congress. President Woodrow Wilson signed the bill into law, and CRS, then called the Legislative Reference Service, was born to serve the legislative needs of the Congress," (Congressional Research Service, n.d.). "In the first decade of the present century, legislators throughout the United States became increasingly aware of the growing complexity of legislation and of the importance of having at hand the fullest possible data regarding legislative proposals. In many States this awareness led to the formation of legislative reference bureaux, charged often with the dual function of seeking out and presenting the basic facts pertinent to any given legislative matter and of drafting appropriate Bills" (Galloway, 1954, p. 261). In 1946 statutory recognition was given to the research function—the Legislative Reorganization Act authorized the Librarian of Congress to make the service a separate department of the library to (a) advise and assist any committee in the analysis, appraisal, and evaluation of legislative proposals, (b) provide "a basis for the proper determination of measures before the committee," and (c) prepare summaries and digests. The Act provided for the appointment of senior specialists in broad legislative fields (Galloway, 1954, p. 262). "With the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, Congress renamed the agency the Congressional Research Service and significantly expanded its statutory obligations. The services provided today by CRS are a direct result of congressional directives and guidance" (Congressional Research Service, n.d.). In the UK the shift from classic library to full-blown scientific information/research service can be seen in the staffing figures for the House of Commons Library. In 1946 it had 7 staff, just before the transformation began, and this increased to 35 in 1965, 55 in 1972, 126 in 1982, and around 200 in 1992–2000 (Rush, 2001, pp. 129–130).
5. Wu (2008), on the U.S. Congress, notes that Jefferson's offer to sell his book collection to supply Congress with a new library as a new source of knowledge and information (after the original was destroyed) was based on the Enlightenment ideal that people should be guided by reason and scientific knowledge (p. 357).
6. To give one historical example, Menhennet reports the House of Commons library using data from the Australian and Canadian parliamentary libraries to show that their own staffing was inadequate (2000, p. 96). There have been similar cases even recently within the IFLA Section.
7. In two further cases, the delay exceeded two years; the UK is a special case; the precise chronology of the other ten is not clear from the sources used (*World Directory of Parliamentary Libraries*, 1998; *World Encyclopaedia of Parliaments and Legislatures*, 1998).
8. Switzerland is a possible exception, see note 22. For Westminster, pre-1945 "the concept of a parliamentary library as a dynamic institution having the supply of information as its prime function was taking a very long time to get itself accepted—by Members as well as by others" (Menhennet, 2000, p. 65). "There was a certain amount of criticism in the inter-war years . . . mainly that [the Library] did not afford Members a satisfactory and active information-giving service. *Though there is no particular evidence that the majority of Members felt this way* [emphasis added], Sir George Benson . . . wrote, "as a back-bench Member in 1930, I was appalled to find the House of Commons served by a Library which had hardly progressed since 1850" (House of Commons, 2005, p. 5). "In 1945 there was a very large influx of new Members who, it became rapidly clear, required a more sophisticated information service than the Library could offer. Accordingly, a Select Committee was set up, and its Reports . . . remain the fullest investigation ever held into the Library." In many ways, the Committee's recommendations still form the basis of the modern remit of the Department. "Your Committee feel that the Library of the House of Commons . . . should be made into a unique institution . . . far more than a repository of books and parliamentary papers." In their first report, they had declared "the essential purpose of the Library is to supply Members with information rapidly on any of the multifarious matters which come before the House, or to which their attentions are drawn by their parliamentary duties" (p. 6). The chair of this committee was the George Benson referred to in the previous paragraph, underlining the importance of individual reformers.
9. Menhennet (2000) reports that Ivor Jennings of the University of London was promoting

"parliamentary reform" and quotes from a document of Jennings from 1934 "at a time when the House was having to cope with an ever-expanding range of subjects, many of them highly complex and technical, no serious attempt was being made to supply Members of Parliament with up-to-date literature and current information" (p. 64) Jennings argued that the Parliament needed a modern library on relevant topics, a capacity to catalog and index, and research capacity. (Members at this time lacked their own staff). Another critic of library facilities mentioned by Menhennet is H. G. Wells (in 1932)—Wells was an enthusiast for the new science of "documentation." Later, "The information explosion of the sixties brought unprecedented attention to bear on the needs of Parliament for sound, up-to-date information and for adequate research assistance. . . . When one seeks to explain the undoubtedly rapid growth of the Library from 1965 onwards, one's conclusion must be that pressure for improvements from Members, *combined with an increasingly articulate awareness of the importance of such information services among academic and other outside observers*, proved to be a very strong force indeed" (emphasis added) (p. 90). Michael Rush, with Anthony Barker, was one of those influential academic commentators, outlining criticism of Parliament and other institutions and offering better information provision as one solution (p. 85). Another prominent academic commentator was Bernard Crick whose "Reform of Parliament," published in 1964, claimed that the House of Commons library was underpowered compared to provision in the United States. His work was linked to the set-up of the Study of Parliament Group in 1964. It is still running and seems to have been a key (and discreet) location for academic reformers to engage with parliamentary officials and for a reform agenda to be shaped. It was apparently behind reforms for "26 years" from 1964 (p. 90). "Although its findings are published, the Group's meetings are usually private" (Study of Parliament Group, June 26, 2001, at http://www.spg.org.uk).

10. A separate IFLA Section for parliamentary libraries was founded in 1966. Among the other professional forums: the Nordic parliamentary libraries have had formal cooperation since 1922; the Association of Parliamentary Librarians in Canada (APLIC/ABPAC) was founded in 1975; the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) in 1977; the Association of Parliamentary libraries of Australasia (APLA) in 1984 with informal cooperation dating to 1972.
11. The U.S. Special Libraries Association (SLA) was established in 1909; Aslib, the Association for Information Management, the British organization for special libraries and information, was established in 1924 (Black et al., 2007, p. 29).
12. In 1994 a project was launched to merge the then European Parliament Library with the research and internal documentation functions in a new service, EPiCentre. When this project was aborted in 1997, the library was renamed Parliamentary Documentation Centre (Tomlins, 1999, pp. 32–36). The title reverted to "Library" ca. 2004—the new name had confused potential clients.
13. "Library" can = "information service," and in any case SPICe actually appears to have (on a small scale) the elements of a conventional library service—see Mansfield (2009). For the description of the conventional elements of a library, see especially pp. 21–22.
14. To justify his analysis, Wu cites work by: Carol H. Weiss; David Whiteman; Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram; Allen Schick; Charles O. Jones; Robert H. Haveman; David R. Mayhew; E. C. Banfield; R. Douglas Arnold; David K. Cohen and Janet A. Weiss; and A. Frye.
15. E.g., "With the increase in the range of subjects, issues, interests and disciplines of interest to parliamentarians, there has been a parallel increase in the quantity of information available, until we have today a general awareness of the concept of 'information overload'" (Marcella et al., 1999, p. 171).
16. E.g., "The main constraint on Members is time" (Corbett, Jacobs, & Shackleton, 2007, p. 57), and "an individual MEP is faced with tough choices. . . . How much time should they spend in parliament and at home? Should they remain generalists or seek to become policy specialists? What activities should they concentrate on?" (p. 58). Anecdotally, the information issue is more often presented in terms of "how do I easily get hold of the right information which I know is out there somewhere?" Rather than in complaints about "too much information." There is a possible parallel with the academic world. Nicholas et al., in a study of the use of specialist databases, ask a rhetorical question: "How does all this activity [searches of specialist databases] square with the concerns that dominated the [information] profession 20 years ago that the huge availability of data would result in

overload? Well, in interviews we have conducted with academics in 2008, the term rarely came up and when the interviewer prompted the interviewee, they simply shrugged their shoulders. They are resigned to it; it is just part of the scenery or the academic assault course, and it is a small price to pay for the unbelievable level of access obtained" (Nicholas, Huntington, Jamali, & Dobrowolski, 2008, p. 125).

17. Rush (2001) quotes an 1820s pamphlet on the UK parliament: "Parliament is now overwhelmed with business. . . . [acts, public petitions and]. . . . There are piles upon piles of reports. From the Colonial Department alone, in 1825, were laid on the table papers amounting to 5,000 pages. The printed papers of a session, entirely exclusive of the bills printed, the votes of the two Houses, and Journals, exceed twenty-five full-sized and closely-printed folio volumes" (p. 53).
18. Gigerenzer is a psychologist and Director of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development. He offers an accessible overview of his work in: *Gut Feelings: Short Cuts to Better Decision Making* (London: Penguin, 2008).
19. Note also Marcella et al. (1999): "Barker and Rush's (1970) study of the information needs of the British MP, although dated, concludes that speed is the most significant aspect of information retrieval for MPs, and that less experienced MPs are more inclined to request additional information in the form of reports and policy analyses." Members with less environmental knowledge and accumulated experience have to scan a larger quantity of formal information to reach a conclusion.
20. Miler (2009, p. 87) notes the same point: "Citizens do not need full information in order to act as if they had engaged in an exhaustive information search because they can use heuristics to compensate for their low levels of information and make higher quality decisions about politics than their knowledge levels would suggest."
21. The Miler article appeared a few months after the original (IFLA Conference) version of this paper. It reports research from the early part of this decade.
22. Some processes are just too complex to track at a reasonable cost. In as far as impact is made via decisions in individual minds involving multiple factors, or through general environmental knowledge influencing specific decisions, then can it be tracked at all? Is it a problem beyond current scientific solution? One scientific method would be to run an experiment depriving a parliament of a library. This experiment has already been run and it is available for historical study. In Switzerland the present form of parliamentary secretariat has "only been in existence since 1972. Previously, any services required by parliament were provided by the [Executive]. The legislative committees were directly served by the relevant offices of the Federal Administration. In the 1960s, these structures were increasingly the target of criticism. The Mirage Affair . . . clearly showed that the existing structures had to be improved and that they were incompatible with the principle of the separation of powers." The Parliament relied on the Executive for information and as a consequence was perceived as failing to hold it properly to account—see for background Wikipedia (n.d.). "As a consequence of the Mirage Affair, the first services were set up . . .: a Secretariat for the Auditing Committee and a Documentation Service . . . documentation tasks (the provision of information and knowledge independently of the administration) were central tasks of the Parliamentary Services from the start" (Frischknecht, 2003, pp. 2–3).
23. The affair is referred to in Corbett et al. (2007, p. 288). Scientific and Technical Options Assessment (STOA), a research unit of the Parliament, contracted a study that included reference to this telecommunications surveillance system. According to a more detailed account by the author of the research report, "The section dealing with ECHELON in the STOA report only ran to a few pages," and when it went to committee in December 1997 "it would have been largely ignored had it not been for a Daily Telegraph article . . . which alerted the international media" (Wright, 2005, p. 213). Wright notes that "Nothing in the STOA report was new but its packaging in a formal report for the European Parliament led to a 'tipping point.' Interest in ECHELON mushroomed and all the European Member States had parliamentary debates about it." This in turn led to the commissioning of further STOA research and the set-up of a temporary European Parliament Committee, "which created some of the best [and] most informed organised knowledge on the existence of ECHELON, its activities and limitations. Almost every serious newspaper in the world has now covered ECHELON. Why? Because one package of organised knowledge, put together in a serious format was able to catalyse subsequent interest" (Wright, p. 213).

24. This refers to the concept of core competences developed by Hamel and Prahalad (1994) and discussed at greater length in earlier versions of the paper.
25. Classically, deliberation has been a feature of legislatures as well as in some parts of the judiciary (pp. 217–218). Interest in deliberative democracy practiced by citizens has been around since ca. 1990 (p. 215) but theorists draw attention to parallels in ancient Greece.

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